

## Discovery Centre Celebrates 21 Years

1989 - 2010

From humble beginnings in the 1980s, the Daintree Discovery Centre has been transformed into a world class ecotourism facility that is earning international acclaim.

*Congratulations on winning the Skai International Sustainable Ecotourism Award against such an outstanding field of entrants from 48 countries, worldwide.*

*Hulya Aslantas, President Skai World Congress, Hungary*

This amazing interpretive centre not only allows thousands of people to explore every level of the rainforest, from the forest floor to the upper reaches of the canopy, but the amazing thing is that they can do this without damaging the fragile rainforest root systems.

The owners Pam and Ron Birkett are obviously proud of their achievements. They not only built everything from scratch, but have done so without relying on other sources of funding. A fantastic achievement given the challenges of taking on such an ambitious project at a time when there was no government funding available, no local infrastructure and no support services.



Building in a tropical wilderness, where the rainfall can be up to four metres a year is difficult at the best of times. But in the mid 1980s the notion of building an environmental interpretive centre in the heart of the Daintree Rainforest was viewed as somewhat 'eccentric'.

Many people thought the whole idea was a foolish dream!

There is no doubt the Discovery Centre was well ahead of its time. But with unflinching persistence, dogged determination and boundless enthusiasm, Pam and Ron Birkett have built an award winning asset that continues to set a new benchmark for the ecotourism industry.

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## Welcome

The Discovery Centre was the brain-child of owners Pam and Ron Birkett.

The initial catalyst for building an environmental centre in the middle of the rainforest came about because of a visit to the Daintree in the 1980s.

Being true visionaries, the Birketts were determined to build a first class facility that would both entertain and educate visitors about this very special part of the world.

Congratulations Pam and Ron, and to all those who, over the years, have contributed to this world class, multi-award winning Ecotourism Centre.

shelley  
EDITOR

### Did you know...

*The Centre has informed more than one million visitors about the antiquity of the Daintree Rainforest. At more than 100 million years old, the Daintree is the oldest surviving tropical rainforest in the world!*



# Snapshots

1980's...



1990's...



2000's...



# *in time...*



# In the beginning they had a dream.

## The rationale

The Birketts read about the famous 'Daintree' but had never visited. In 1986 they set off from Adelaide to see what all the fuss was about!

Along with lots of other travellers, they were disappointed with the lack of information available. There was limited access to the forest and few opportunities for visitors to learn about the fauna and flora, or to begin to understand the historical, biological and social context of this unique wilderness. Government infrastructure was non-existent and there were limited interpretive facilities north of Port Douglas.

Following worldwide press coverage of the 'Daintree Blockade' more people were being drawn to the area and opportunistic tour operators started hacking trails through the forest creating untold damage to the fragile under-story.



Daintree Blockade

Horrified by such reckless desecration, Pam and Ron purchased two freehold parcels of low-land rainforest bordering the National Park and made a personal commitment to develop a first class interpretive centre that would not only allow visitors to learn about and explore the rainforest in safety and comfort, but at the same time, protect this precious environment.

Pam had just completed an international OECD Research project in Alaska and Canada and was impressed with the way they showcased their 'natural treasures'.

So she phoned Bob Hawke, who was Prime Minister at the time, and argued the need for an interpretive centre in the Daintree.'

## Early Days

Ron and Pam have fond memories of the first foray onto their Tulip Oak Road property. They were still living in Adelaide at the time, and bought a new Nissan Patrol especially for the trip to the Daintree. They hitched up their camper trailer and headed north up the unsealed, Stuart Highway.

They joke about it now but it was a mammoth undertaking at the time. Being a teacher, Pam's time was restricted to two weeks of school holidays so they had no time to waste and drove the 1,500 kms from Adelaide to Alice Springs non-stop. They arranged for the Nissan to have its first service, then drove 650 kms to Tennant Creek. After 'turning right' they drove another 1,600 kms to Townsville, 'turned left' and headed for the Daintree.

With the help of Pam's sister and brother-in-law, they did this trip in less than 2 days!! It was certainly an incredible achievement.

Pam recalls 'It was my turn to drive. We were in the middle of the Barclay Highway, everyone was asleep and I was ploughing along at a great rate of knots when Ron woke and exclaimed 'What's that noise?' One of the tyres on the camper trailer had blown'.



Blow-out on Barclay Highway

*'The 'bull dust' was so thick I hadn't even noticed. By the time we got around to inspecting the tyre it was completely shredded!'*

And Ron recounts another incident driving through the Daintree. One of the creeks was well up and the four of them flipped a coin to see who was going to wade across to check the depth . . . and look for crocodiles! It was an unforgettable introduction to the Daintree.



Flooded Creeks

The group spent their first night camped on the Birkett's newly acquired property, right beside a swiftly flowing McLean's Creek. Although it was supposed to be the 'dry' season the heaven's opened up and the rain bucketed down; non stop for 3 days!

*We had the wettest time!* says Pam. *We were soaked to the skin and bitten alive by mosquitoes.*

As the creek continued to rise concerns were raised about whether they might get flooded in and the group decided to make their way down to Cape Kimberley where a new camp ground was being established. What an ordeal that turned out to be – the road was a quagmire and would have been impossible without a 4WD.

The next few days were spent surveying the block and generally soaking up the wonders of the rainforest; the frogs, the flowers, the fruit. It was a truly amazing introduction to this unique wilderness and one the Birketts will never forget.

## Challenges of building in a wilderness

To say that building in the Daintree in the late 80s was a challenge is something of an understatement!

Apart from the badly corrugated road that smothered the forest in dust during the 'dry' and was prone to washaways during the 'wet', there was no reticulated water or power supplies, no computers, no phone reception and certainly no internet. In fact, the only time Ron could contact Peter Cordingly, the builder, was on a Wednesday when Peter played golf at Mossman.



The Centre starts to take shape

In the early days there were no deliveries. For many years the Birketts used to bring everything up in a trusty (or was that 'rusty') old Troop Carrier with the back doors tied up with fencing wire.

Ron says he often acted as delivery man; cleaning supplies, toilet paper, even the monthly supply of powdered milk all had to come from Cairns. No such thing as fresh milk because there was no overnight refrigeration!

Andrew and Angela Small were the first members of staff to live on the premises and moved into their new home in June 1989; two weeks after the birth of their daughter, Heidi.

*The first few weeks were a crash course in rainforest living, recalls Angela. Water streamed down the hill during tropical downpours, melomys streamed through the*

*house, munching on my treasured belongings, and waking me in the night chewing my hair.*



Living in the middle of the rainforest

During the 'wet', when the Daintree River was up, the low lying flood plains either side of the river were often impassable for days. And there was more than one occasion when getting back to Cairns, in order to catch a plane home to Adelaide was a logistical nightmare.

*'Many a time we were up to our knees mud' tells Pam. And once, when hitching a ride back to Cairns with well known potter, Ellen Terrell, she remembers getting bogged to the axles. Fortunately two friends came along and helped push Ellen's old van the last 100 metres to the ferry.*

*'We were not a pretty sight!' says Pam 'And carrying a change of clothes was mandatory. The only problem was that we always had to travel with two sets of clothes; one for meetings, and our 'Daintree' gear, that was invariably stained red with mud or chewed by melomys!'*



Daintree River Ferry

White-tailed rats were another story. They preferred chewing suitcases and electrical cords!

## Research and Development

Originally known as the Daintree Rainforest Environmental Centre, this development set new standards for community consultation.

Over a two year period the Birketts met with a wide variety of stakeholders including; National Parks (QPWS/DERM), Wet Tropics Management Authority, State Government, Douglas Shire Council, CSIRO, James Cook University, local residents and indigenous elders.



Daintree Rainforest Environmental Centre

They had lengthy consultations with museums, educational groups both here and overseas, as well as a number of commercial operators.

*Congratulations! There are no publicly accessible facilities of this type in the Wet Tropics and we would be very interested in consulting with you on this project.*

*Peter Hitchcock, Exec Director  
Wet Tropics Management Authority*

The end result was the Daintree Rainforest Environmental Centre; a small but important local asset that helped establish the Daintree as a responsible ecotourism destination.

# Tough Beginnings

For the first few years Ron and Pam Birkett, along with their friend and business partner, Heather l'Anson put everything they had into the Centre.

Heather recalls *'We didn't make much money in those days but I have to admit I wouldn't have missed it for the world!'*

Heather eventually withdrew from the business to concentrate on other commitments. But for more than a decade Ron and Pam continued to support the Centre by working in Adelaide and later in Sydney.

They poured all their savings into the business and for many years didn't so much as draw an airfare from the profits.

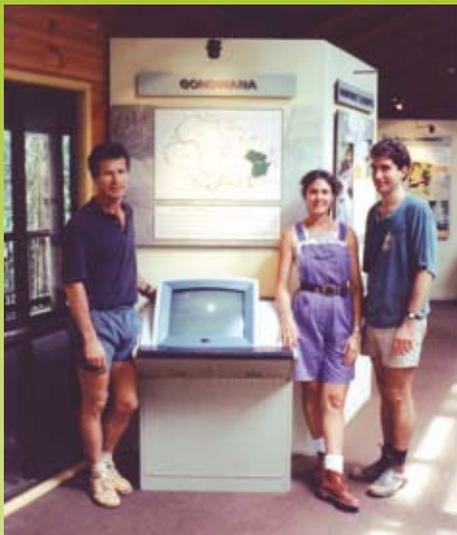
What profits? As many people would remember the late 80's were a tough time for anyone in the tourism business in Far North Qld.

*'We had only been open six weeks when the 1989 pilot strike hit and there were hardly any visitors for the next nine months. Interest rates were 17%, petrol was in short supply and it is estimated that up to 30% of small businesses folded',* says Ron Birkett.

*'It certainly wasn't easy and if we hadn't been earning good money elsewhere the business would not have survived.'*

Looking back on those early days the Birketts believe that one of the good things to come out of these challenges was the management structure they set up.

*'One of our strengths is that Ron and I work on the business, not in the business!'* says Pam. *'In the early days we had no choice but to employ others to run things for us. But over the years this has turned out to be an advantage'.*



Staff worked as a collegiate team

It forced the staff to be independent and provided us with a solid foundation for what is now heralded as one of Queensland's most outstanding organisational models for small business operators.

## Locals supporting locals

The building contract was let to a local contractor, Peter Cordingly, and for the next 6 months Peter and his team worked like Trojans!

The Birketts took great care to protect the integrity of the site. In fact the Centre was built around trees rather than remove them.



Centre was built around trees

No trees were removed. No heavy machinery was brought in, no rain-forest timbers used, no endemic species were affected and great lengths were taken to make sure wildlife corridors were protected.



Atrium allows for natural light

*'We have lots of nice memories of those times; of everyone pitching in, of working out the problems over a beer at the end of the day. And one of the best things was being able to make on-the-spot changes as we went',* says Ron.



Visiting Ecotourism Consultants

The Centre has attracted a lot of interest, particularly from South East Asian groups, wanting to develop similar ecotourism ventures.

# An outstanding achievement

When the Centre opened in June 1989 it was considered an outstanding achievement in Environmental Design. Everything was built off the ground; the main building was a pole construction and the timber boardwalks were elevated so they didn't damage the sensitive rainforest root systems.

The open plan allowed for natural light and maximum air flow. Overhead fans helped combat mould and rainwater was stored in tanks.



Interpretive Centre, Reception & Shop  
At that time the Centre comprised the Interpretive Display Centre, and two boardwalks that meandered through the nearby rainforest.

The reception desk and souvenir shop were located just inside the entrance door and refreshments were served on the back deck.



Tea and Coffee on the Back Deck

They were the days of beautiful hand made coffee cups and tea pots made by local potter, Ellen Terrell. A lack of refrigeration meant powdered milk was the norm and there was a constant battle to stop

the white tailed rats from raiding the biscuit containers.

*As visitor numbers increased so did the tour companies that included the Centre in their daily itineraries and it wasn't long before we outgrew the original refreshment area, says Pam.*

The extended coffee shop, with its wonderful rainforest outlook, was to come a little later.

In the beginning the whole thing was relatively modest, especially when compared to the Discovery Centre of today. However, the Daintree Rainforest Environmental Centre was the forerunner of bigger and better things.

Not only is the Discovery Centre an accredited Wet Tropic Visitor Information Centre but was one of the first businesses in Queensland to achieve Advanced Eco-Tourism Accreditation. They are also foundation members of the TNQ Planet Safe program.

Despite being a privately owned, family business, DDC has proven to be an outstanding success. The business is self sufficient and continues to set new standards for the ecotourism industry.

Continuing research and development and an ongoing commitment to quality customer service, has resulted in DDC setting a benchmark for the eco-tourism industry throughout Australia.

*The Discovery Centre is simply brilliant and testimony to your vision, hard work and commitment. I will now be using it as a cornerstone of my talks around the world on world-class Global Ecotourism attractions.*

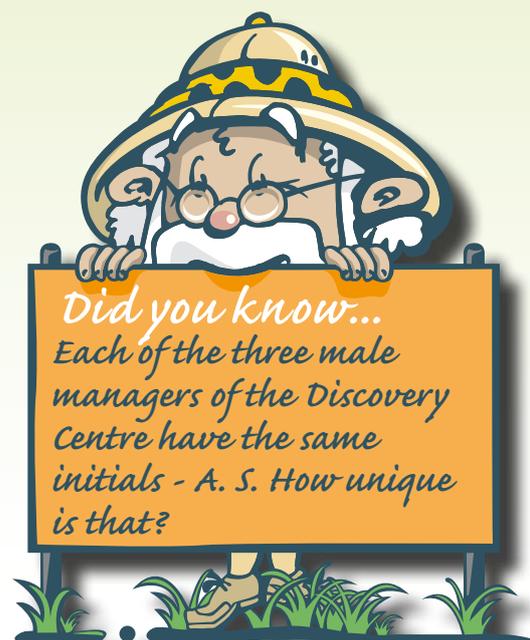
*Professor Ross Dowling Chair  
ECU Environment Committee*

## Onsite managers

When the Centre opened in 1989 on-site managers ran the Centre. The first team consisted of Gretlyn McCrae and Andrew Small, ably supported by Andrew's wife Angie and baby daughter Heidi.



Andrew and Lisa Spooner followed with Allen Sheather completing the trio of onsite managers until Ron and Pam Birkett relocated to Cairns in February 2000.







# Milestones over the years . . .

Over the years, the Discovery Centre has evolved with more and more features being added.

## Display Centre

In 1989 the Display Centre was a multi-purpose building, housing reception, souvenir shop, refreshment area for tour groups, plus a small theatre showing a slide presentation of rainforest images.

Over the years it has grown to include something for everyone. Interpretive information is carefully layered to cater for all interests and abilities; people for whom English is a second language, those who are hearing or sight impaired, or have learning difficulties.



Interpretive Centre

After humble beginnings, they soon realized that interactive technologies were an increasingly important part of getting the environmental message across. In 1996 touch screen kiosks were introduced. They were an immediate hit with visitors providing information on evolution, ecology, flora and fauna.

There is always something new at DDC and the interpretive centre now includes a fantastic Creek Ecology area, 3D Cassowary Display, Aural History Station, small library, information on Climate Change and a 20 seat DVD Theatre.

## Cassowary Circuit

Right from the outset the walkway system was especially designed to keep people off the ground. The idea was to allow visitors to explore the forest floor, 'up close and personal' but without damaging the fragile environment.

With its viewing platform taking in the giant King Ferns lining McLean's Creek, as well as the addition of reclining viewing benches that provide breathtaking views of gigantic arboreal basket ferns, the Cassowary Circuit is popular with tour groups and is the oldest of DDC's 4 different walkway options.

## Rainforest Tours

Tours can be independent using a complimentary 48 page Interpretive Guide Book and/or an audio guide that includes aboriginal information. Pre-booked tours with specialist DDC guides can be arranged.

Quarterly surveys show that visitors particularly like the range of options available and the fact that they can tailor their visit to suit their needs.

## Canopy Tower

Most people who visit the Centre are on holidays and experience has shown they want to be entertained while they learn. Most people are looking for a 'wow' factor and it wasn't until Ron came up with the idea of a Canopy Tower that things changed for the better.

The opening of the Canopy Tower in March 1998 was a real turning point for the business. It provides the most amazing insight into the rainforest, from the forest floor to the top of the canopy.

It is 23 metres high, has 5 large viewing platforms with information at each level. It is cyclone rated and can accommodate 70+ people at one time. It is part of DDC's Wow Factor

and always scores exceptionally high ratings in customer surveys.

The Tower was another example of DDC being ahead of its time. Even the Council didn't know what to make of it and building approval dragged on for nearly three years. They finally agreed that it wasn't a 'building', but a 'tower', and Ron's vision began to take shape.

Local builder, Kenmac Constructions won the tender and did an outstanding job of completing the project in record time, within budget, and under the most arduous conditions during the 1997 – 98 Wet season.

The Canopy Tower has since received numerous environmental awards and wide spread international acclaim.



Canopy Tower

## Relocation and restructure

While the opening of the Tower opened the flood gates for visitors from all over the world, the next real milestone was when Pam and Ron Birkett decided to relocate from Sydney to Cairns in February 2000 so they could devote more time to the business.

They maintained a 'hands on' approach but decided to establish a residential base in Cairns. Rather than appoint another on-site manager the staff approached Ron and Pam about allowing them to run day-to-day operations as a collegiate team.

This has been an outstanding success. Each person has their own area of responsibility and everyone is accountable for agreed outcomes.

Pam says *'We are good at celebrating successes and everyone shares in the rewards of their efforts.'*

With a 21 year track record of success, the DDC set up is the envy of many other small business operators. It provides the Birketts with the flexibility to 'work on the business, not in the business'.

## Bush Tucker trail

Many overseas tourists are keen to learn about how early settlers and



Bush Tucker Trail

explorers survived in the rainforest, living on snakes, small mammals, birds, plants, nuts and seeds.

While some of this was part of the 'information sheets' given to visitors in the 1990s, it was never enough, so in 2001 the Bush Tucker Trail was added to the Centre's boardwalk tours and the first Interpretive Guide Book was published.



### Indigenous Culture

Local history is a passion for Pam Birkett, and from the inception of the Centre she compiled a record of rainforest foods, medicines, as well as cultural experiences and anecdotal stories about both indigenous and European settlers.

Working with a number of Kuku Yalangi elders in 2006 - 07, Pam arranged for some of this information to be professionally recorded. The narration was done by a local aboriginal person and it is now available as an audio tour. This indigenous information adds another dimension to the cultural heritage of the area and has become a valuable addition to DDC's interpretive tool box.



### Audio Guides in 6 Languages

## Audio Guides

Interpretive materials tend to be visual and are often text based.

This can be a problem for people who do not speak English and those who are vision impaired, or simply forget to bring their glasses!

In 2002 Ron Birkett addressed this issue by introducing an MP3 audio wand that would allow visitors to enjoy guided walks, at their own pace and in their own time.

These Audio Guides are available in 6 languages and offer interpretive information, historical and cultural anecdotes, bird calls and rainforest sounds.

They are extremely popular and are the most comprehensive source of lowland tropical rainforest information for non English speaking visitors in Queensland.

Being non linear they can be programmed to suit personal interests and individual itineraries. A person might spend half an hour or all day at DDC if they choose, and a 7 day re-entry pass allows them to return time and time again free of charge.

# Innovation and improvement . . .

## The Aerial walkway

The construction of the Aerial Walkway and new entrance building in 2003-04 marked another major milestone in the history of DDC. Not only was it a huge investment but an engineering marvel.

*Seldom has site delivery and installation of permanent structures been so demanding, complex and restrictive of normal construction practices. So it is not surprising that the concept and execution of the Discovery Centre Aerial Walkway has won so much acclaim for innovation.*

*George Thomson,  
Galvanizers Assoc of Australian  
Engineering & Environment*



Huge beams moved by hand

Once again, the Birketts insisted that all phases of the construction process be environmentally responsible and that both the Aerial Walkway and the new Entrance building have a minimal footprint.

*Martin McHugh, from Kenmac Constructions did a fantastic job says Ron Birkett. In fact they managed the whole job using hand pulleys and 'come-along' winches. It was an amazing exercise in ingenuity with more than a touch of common sense thrown in.*



Aerial Walkway was built around trees

Despite the trying conditions, the builders enjoyed the challenge. It was the first structure of this type to be built in Far North Qld.

The Aerial Walkway opened up a whole new section of rainforest that had been previously inaccessible and provides unique photo opportunities, not only of the mid-level canopy but also of McLean's Creek.

This is part of an established cassowary corridor and initially some people thought that the Aerial Walkway might disturb the wildlife.

Nothing could be further from the truth, reports one of the builders.

*We saw more cassowaries while working on the walkway than we had ever seen before. They weren't the least bit affected by all the building going on. In fact they were curious to see what was happening.*



Cassowary corridors protected

Visitors to the Centre never fail to be enthralled when a cassowary, often a male with a clutch of chicks in tow, comes wandering by within metres of the walkway.

The Aerial Walkway and Reception Centre was officially opened by the then Minister for the Environment in March 2004



Aerial Walkway has disabled access

## Catering for Special Needs

The Aerial Walkway has wheel chair access to the base of the Tower and Interpretive Display Centre.



It is great for parents with prams or elderly people with walking frame - a service not available elsewhere in the area. It's also a great place to spot cassowaries as they wander along McLean's creek in search of food!



Suitable for wheelchairs

*I was a bit concerned about whether I would be able to cope being in a wheelchair, but it wasn't a problem. The walkway was great and we ended up staying all afternoon.*

*C Trestrail, South Australia*

### Innovation in Action

The Birketts are constantly coming up with new ways to improve the ecotourism industry and as part of the research and development for the Aerial Walkway, Ron came up with an idea that has proved an invaluable asset for the business.

His innovative, open mesh grid system was especially designed for DDC but it has enormous implications for any one involved in moving large numbers of people around sensitive natural environments.



Eco-friendly elevated mesh walkways

Most importantly it keeps people off the ground and prevents damage to fragile rainforest ecosystems. It is virtually maintenance free, easy to erect and dismantle. It allows water, air and sunlight to reach the forest floor and reduces mosquitoes, ensuring a safe and more enjoyable visitor experience.

### Additions to the Interpretive Centre

Interpretive material at DDC is purposely designed to raise environmental awareness and foster cultural respect.

Display panels are carefully layered to cater for all interests and abilities - including people with limited reading skills or are visually challenged.



Catering for everyone's needs

The variety of media used was deliberately planned to cater for everyone's needs; social, cultural and intellectual.

### Freshwater Creek Ecology

There is very little visual interpretation on lowland tropical waterways yet many aquatic systems are seriously threatened. This multi dimensional display traces aquatic life from the mountains to the sensitive mangroves. Designed by an award winning 3D sculptor, it is particularly relevant for people interested in preserving tropical waterways.

### 3D Cassowary Display

DDC is part of a cassowary corridor and cassowaries can often be seen at the Centre. However, staff do not feed them and spotting one is a matter of chance. This spectacular display includes a life size female, male with 2 chicks – a safe and practical way for visitors to have their photo taken with one of these endangered birds.

### Cyclone Display

People are fascinated by cyclones but there is little interpretive information available. This display is extremely popular with overseas visitors. The display doesn't understate the dangers of cyclones, but nor does it over-dramatize the situation. The intent is to inform, not to frighten people.

### Reptile Room

It uses all recycled materials – even some surplus live-stock donated by a local business.

DDC is not a zoo but customer surveys show a significant interest in reptiles and amphibians. They are often nocturnal, well camouflaged and difficult to spot, so rather than have people trampling the rainforest we have recreated the landscape so visitors can observe these elusive creatures without endangering their habitat. In May 2009 we introduced snakes, forest dragons and turtles.



Boyd's Rainforest Dragon

# Carbon Offset

## Carbon Offset - Modelling Best Practice

The Carbon Offset Project is a serious commitment to a reduction in Green House Gasses. The aim is to be a carbon neutral business!

To ensure credibility, in 2007 the Birketts employed an independent consultant, Kim Forde of the Missing Link, to audit the carbon footprint of the Discovery Centre.

The audit reviewed every aspect of the business including energy consumption, diesel/gas/battery storage, petrol used by staff driving to work, commercial vehicles delivering goods, construction techniques, avoidance of heavy machinery.

It calculated emissions from waste management, packaging, food disposal, recycling, water/waste disposal - even the energy required to wash staff uniforms.

Under Kim's guidance they were able to calculate how many trees were needed to offset their CO2 and set up an innovative community based Bio-sequestration program. DDC has now planted more than its specified target and is officially carbon neutral! It will continue to partner groups such as Rainforest Rescue in ongoing plantings.



Revegetating degraded land



DDC staff digging holes for trees

## Bio-sequestration Program

DDC developed a community-based revegetation project involving local school children, the local Cassowary Care Group and other community groups involved in revegetating degraded land.

A Memorandum Of Understanding was signed in 2008 with EPA /QPWS to rehabilitate degraded properties.



Measuring the growth of saplings

This work continues. DDC is also working with James Cook University MTSRF team to measure soil carbon against the growth of these seedlings for 10 years to report on the degree to which the rainforest reduces Green House Gasses.



Dr Mike Liddell - Carbon Flux Station

DDC has committed \$60,000 sponsorship to the JCU Carbon-flux Micrometeorological Project.

Dr Mike Liddell's team has installed sophisticated control equipment on the Centre's Canopy Tower.



*DDC has increased community awareness by their innovative carbon reduction initiatives which have gone beyond the traditional 'tree planting' to include support for local community projects, scientific research and the purchase of land under the Daintree Buy-back program. DDC is helping visitors to understand climate change impacts and how to better manage protected areas.  
Kim Forde, Carbon Offset Consultant*

This measures climate induced changes in carbon storage. The information is then transmitted to a PC in the Interpretive Centre so the public can monitor the results in 'real time'.

These initiatives have broken new ground for joint academic/government/ecotourism partnerships and underline the value of shared goals and sound team work.

While the total number of hectares being rehabilitated, and the number of trees planted is important, at the end of the day the only relevant question is does it make any difference?

That is where the link between DDC's Carbon Offset Project and the MTSRF Project's Carbon-Flux Micrometeorological Project is important. By cross referencing the carbon content of the soil with the growth in the trees planted, and



Carbon Flux Weather Station

the carbon flux data being collected from the micrometeorological weather station on the top of DDC's canopy tower, it is hoped to provide

objective evidence to prove, or refute, current theories on the rate of carbon capture in rainforests.

This is a 10 year study that will conclude in 2017. Short and medium term outcomes such as cassowary numbers, feeding habits, increase in/or loss of habitat, reduction in soil erosion, eradication of exotic weeds and the time needed to rehabilitate cleared land, will help contribute to our overall body of knowledge. However, the thing that sets this partnership apart from others is the significance of the longitudinal data it will produce.

*The Daintree Discovery Centre Carbon Bio-Sequestration Project provides a valuable lead for the Tourism Industry in how to offer carbon offset programs to meet growing tourist expectations.*

*European tourists have become very carbon-emissions conscious and are seeking responsible ways to travel. They will enjoy visiting the Daintree Discovery Centre knowing that their entry fee is contributing to carbon offset.*

*This is an industry leader not only in Far North Queensland but also in Australia.*

*John Grey AC Chancellor  
James Cook University*

## **New initiatives – Climate Change**

DDC's latest interpretive displays focus on growing public interest in all things associated with 'Global Warming'.

As part of the 'Climate Change' story a series of 'mega fauna' are used to show the link between the decline of pre-historic species and radical changes in the Earth's climate. Visitors can not only explore these theories via informative dis-

plays but they can also extend their understanding of the issues by immersing themselves in a series of DVDs that explain the concept in detail.

## **One Million Visitors**

In 2008 the Daintree Discovery Centre celebrated welcoming its one millionth visitor.



As part of the celebration, the Centre launched its Carbon Offset / Bio-sequestration project.



From humble beginnings in 1989, the Daintree Discovery Centre has really come of age.



Celebrating 1 Million Visitors

## Award Gallery 2004 – 2010

2004 was the beginning of a long list of awards for the Daintree Discovery Centre, covering a wide range of categories; ecotourism, environmental sustainability, environmental design, community support, building innovation, staff training and development, as well as small business management.



Telstra Small Business of the Year

Their first win was the TTNQ Tourism Award for Ecotourism in 2004. They subsequently won this award three years in a row!

The same year they won the Qld Master Builders Award for a Tourism and Hospitality Facility Under \$2 million.

This was quickly followed by the prestigious, Telstra Australian Government's, Queensland Small Business of the Year Award in 2005.



DSC Sustainable Communities Award

The Wet Tropics Management Authority Cassowary Award and the Small Business Employer of Year in the Qld Regional Training Awards capped off 2005.

The list goes on and among some of DDC's most significant awards are the QTA 'The Steve Irwin Ecotourism Award' in 2007, Douglas Shire Council Sustainable Communities Award for 2007, Ecotourism Australia's – Eco Operator of the Year Commendation in 2008, Induction into the Tropical North Qld Tourism Awards Hall of Fame in 2008, TNQ as well as the Queensland Tourism Awards for the best Tourist Attraction in 2009.



2009 Queensland Tourist Attractions

And of course the crowning glory was winning the Skal International Ecotourism Awards for Sustainable



Skal Sustainable Ecotourism Award

Tourism in Hungary in November 2009.

This was an outstanding achievement that has really put Tropical North Queensland on the international ecotourism map.

The Discovery Centre was competing against 48 other countries, and the award was presented to Pam and Ron Birkett, before an audience of more than 1,000 tourism professionals, at the Palace of the Arts, in Budapest.

Since 2004 the Discovery Centre has gained wide spread industry recognition for its achievements, as demonstrated by their enviable swag of awards.



Celebrating achievements!

But there is some breaking news! While preparing this compilation of the first 21 years of the Daintree Discovery Centre, the owners have just been notified that the Centre has been short listed as a finalist for the 2010 Telstra Australian Government Small Business of the Year.

**Go the Discovery Centre!**